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**Pakistan's Tribal Lands: Central Front in the War  
Against the Global Islamist Insurgency**

by

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## Preface

As the United States retools for the fight in Afghanistan, we run the risk of marginalizing the problem posed by al Qaeda across the border in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The purpose of this paper is to: 1) emphasize the threat emanating from the FATA, 2) explore various policy options informed by historical experience, and 3) recommend a comprehensive long-term strategy for defeating al Qaeda and its associates in Pakistan.

The President's recently announced "comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" reflects many of this paper's recommendations. However, there is one notable exception: the deployment of a small US ground contingent to train and advise Pakistani forces. This is a key component to establishing security—a precondition for all else the United States and Pakistan hopes to achieve.

I relied extensively on current reporting by journalists on the ground as well as official US government reports and statements. I also borrowed heavily from the detailed and thorough work of the Council on Foreign Relations, RAND Corporation, and the International Crisis Group. The Public Broadcasting Service's *Frontline* program and Ahmed Rashid's *Descent into Chaos* provided a solid foundation on which this paper rests.

Lastly, I recommend William McCallister's "Operations in Pakistan's Tribal Areas" in the *Small Wars Journal* as a compelling warning for any overly ambitious strategy for the FATA.

## **Abstract**

Al Qaeda's safe haven in Pakistan is critical to its enduring ability to conduct global operations against the United States, its allies, and its interests. Reducing or eliminating that safe haven will have a significant impact on the organization's operational capacity. The United States must partner with the Pakistani government to further disrupt al Qaeda's safe haven in the near-term while simultaneously conducting counterinsurgency (COIN) operations to roll back the spread of the Taliban in the long-term. Eliminating al Qaeda's sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal areas will not defeat the global Islamist insurgency, nor resolve the myriad issues in Pakistan, nor win the war in Afghanistan, but it is a prerequisite for all three. This paper first details al Qaeda's safe haven in Pakistan and describes what the United States and Pakistan have done so far to address it. It then explores three approaches for combating al Qaeda in Pakistan: 1) air policing, 2) co-opting local tribes, and 3) traditional COIN operations. Lastly, it recommends a set of guiding principles for developing a new strategy.

**Figure 1: Map of Pakistan's Provinces**



Source: Daniel Markey, *Securing Pakistan's Tribal Belt*.

**Figure 2: Map of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas**



Source: GAO, *Combating Terrorism: The United States Lacks Comprehensive Plan to Destroy the Terrorist Threat and Close the Safe Haven in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas*.



## SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

**Introduction.** The *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community* prepared for the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2009 assessed that al Qaeda's senior leaders use Pakistan's "tribal areas as a base from which they can avoid capture, produce propaganda, communicate with operational cells abroad, and provide training and indoctrination to new terrorist operatives."<sup>1</sup> Al Qaeda's safe haven in Pakistan is critical to its enduring ability to conduct global operations against the United States, its allies, and its interests. Reducing or eliminating that safe haven will have a significant impact on the organization's operational capacity. The Brookings Institution's Bruce Riedel asserts that the United States must:

target al Qaeda's leaders, who provide the inspiration and direction for the global jihad. As long as they are alive and active, they will symbolize successful resistance to the United States and continue to attract new recruits. The death of bin Laden and his senior associates in Pakistan ... would not end the movement, but it would deal al Qaeda a serious blow.<sup>2</sup>

The United States must partner with the Pakistani government to further disrupt al Qaeda's safe haven in the near-term while simultaneously conducting counterinsurgency (COIN) operations to roll back the spread of the Taliban in the long-term. Eliminating al Qaeda's sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal areas will not defeat the global Islamist insurgency, nor resolve the myriad issues in Pakistan, nor win the war in Afghanistan, but it is a prerequisite for all three. This paper first details al Qaeda's safe haven in Pakistan and describes what the United States and Pakistan have done so far to address it. It then explores three approaches for combating al Qaeda in Pakistan: 1) air policing, 2) co-opting local tribes, and 3) traditional COIN operations. Lastly, it recommends a set of guiding principles for developing a new strategy that acknowledges the centrality of Pakistan's tribal areas. Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, known as the FATA, is the new central front in the war against the global Islamist insurgency.

**Threat Assessment.** The storm clouds over the FATA were forecast years ago. A year after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and subsequent operations in Afghanistan, President George W. Bush released a revised National Security Strategy (NSS) that articulated the administration's post-9/11 worldview. The 2002 NSS recognized that "weak states ... can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states."<sup>3</sup> It pledged to "disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations by denying further sponsorship, support, and sanctuary."<sup>4</sup> The subsequent National Strategy for Combating Terrorism released in 2003 affirmed, "Terrorism cannot have a place of refuge. It must be rooted out and destroyed." It tasked the Department of State, Department of Defense, and the Intelligence Community to develop plans to close terrorist safe havens.<sup>5</sup> A year later, the 9/11 Commission Report detailed the "direct and indirect value of the Afghan sanctuary to al Qaeda in preparing the 9/11 attack." As a result, the Commission concluded, "The US government must identify and prioritize actual or potential terrorist sanctuaries. For each, it should have a realistic strategy to keep possible terrorist insecure and on the run, using all elements of national power."<sup>6</sup>

Yet, five years after the 2002 NSS, a July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate assessed that al Qaeda "has protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including: a safe haven in the Pakistan FATA, operational lieutenants and its top leadership."<sup>7</sup> An April 2008 Government Accounting Office report warned, "The United States has not met its national security goals to destroy terrorist threats and close the safe haven in Pakistan's FATA."<sup>8</sup> Former CIA Director Michael Hayden commented at a recent Atlantic Council forum, "Al Qaeda, operating from its safe haven in Pakistan's tribal areas, remains the most clear and present danger to the safety of the United States. If there is a major strike against this country, it will bear the finger prints of al Qaeda."<sup>9</sup> The Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Blair,

testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee this March that, “al-Qa’ida’s core organization in the tribal areas of Pakistan is...the most dangerous component of the larger al-Qa’ida network.”<sup>10</sup> There is near-universal agreement amongst senior US officials that the FATA sanctuary poses a central challenge to winning the war against al Qaeda and its affiliates.

**Safe Haven Defined.** Why is a reliable safe haven so critical to al Qaeda’s success? The *Ungoverned Areas Project* report prepared for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSDP) in 2007 defined safe havens as “places and situations that enable illicit actors to operate with impunity or evade detection and capture.”<sup>11</sup> History shows that safe haven, or sanctuary, is an essential element for the success of terrorist organizations. It affords them space to train, plan, direct, recruit, fund, and arm with relative freedom. A good safe haven provides *invisibility* for the terrorist and *operational access* to potential targets.<sup>12</sup> These two requirements are generally found in ungoverned or under-governed areas—those areas characterized by ineffective government control due to a lack of capacity or will. Failed or failing states are ripe for safe haven. The World Bank identified 26 countries in its 2006 listing of “fragile” states, an increase of 9 from the previous list in 2003.<sup>13</sup> The report said these states are marked by “weak security, fractured societal relations, corruption, breakdown in the rule of law, lack of mechanisms for generating legitimate power.”<sup>14</sup> It is here that terrorists seek refuge.

The *Ungoverned Territories* study conducted by RAND for the US Air Force in 2007 and the aforementioned OUSDP study provide a detailed analysis of the factors that enable safe havens. They can be broadly characterized as: 1) adequate infrastructure, 2) hospitality, and 3) poor governance. Terrorist organizations require some basic infrastructure to support their operations. This includes communications capabilities, a transportation system, weapons availability, access to personnel, and sources of income. A safe haven must also provide a

hospitable environment for the illicit actors. This typically includes cultural, religious, or ethnic affinities with the “guests”, a set of shared grievances, and the existence of ongoing conflict or violence to help set the stage. Lastly, a good safe haven is marked by poor governance. This includes limited penetration by the government into the society, a lack of monopoly of force, and a lack of political will to extend government control over the region. Taken together, these characteristics define current and potential areas around the globe that are conducive to providing safe haven. The RAND study analyzed eight potential safe havens and found the Pakistani-Afghan border region to be the “prototypical ungoverned territory.”<sup>15</sup> The remainder of this paper explores how al Qaeda has turned it into a thriving safe haven.

## **SECTION TWO: AL QAEDA’S SAFE HAVEN IN PAKISTAN**

**FATA Background.** Pakistan is the world’s sixth most populous country with 175 million people. It is made up of four provinces, Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), the disputed Kashmir territories, and the semiautonomous FATA which sits along the Durand Line, Pakistan’s disputed border with Afghanistan. There are seven agencies within the FATA: Bajour, Mohmand, Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan. The FATA is squarely in the middle of the region’s Pashtun ethnic belt. There are 15 million Pashtuns on the Afghan side of the border, 28 million in Pakistan, and 3.5 million between them in the FATA.<sup>16</sup> The FATA is governed by the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) which date to 1901 when the region was under British colonial rule. As a result, the people of the FATA are legally distinct from the rest of the Pakistani population. Laws passed in the Pakistani National Assembly do not apply to the FATA. FATA residents are not afforded constitutional protections or due process in Pakistani courts and are subject to

Presidential decrees as executed through each agency's Political Agent who answers to the provincial governor of the NWFP. Political Agents have broad administrative powers, control the official system of patronage, and can detain tribesmen for up to three years with little or no cause.<sup>17</sup> When the Pakistani state won its independence in 1947, the tribes of the FATA preferred to keep this administrative arrangement which left them with a degree of autonomy. It allowed them to retain the tribal structure with little or no interference from the central government. Islamabad agreed to keep government troops out of the FATA and to pay the tribal elders, or maliks, to act as intermediaries with their tribes. While the central government imposed no taxes or duties on the FATA, they also limited federal investment in the region. The FATA remains an isolated backwater with scant development. The literacy rate in the FATA is 17 percent as compared to 54 percent nationally.<sup>18</sup> Per capita income in the FATA is half of the national average. There are a mere 500 doctors for the entire FATA population.<sup>19</sup>

**Al Qaeda's Refuge.** During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the FATA hosted thousands of mujahedeen. The Pakistani government used the area to funnel funds and equipment from the United States and Saudi Arabia to the Afghan resistance. It was here that Bin Laden and his al Qaeda remnants would escape during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). A large pocket of Arab fighters coalesced in the mountains of Tora Bora in December 2001. A poorly executed campaign led by Afghan militias allowed Bin Laden and as many as 800 al Qaeda fighters to escape over the border into the FATA.<sup>20</sup> By summer 2002, some 3,500 foreign fighters, a mixture of Arabs, Chechens, and Uzbeks, had settled in Waziristan and established a new base of operations.<sup>21</sup> Within a year, al Qaeda had built fixed training camps in Waziristan for bomb making, reconnaissance, and heavy weapons employment.<sup>22</sup> The camps trained about 500 at any one time in 2005. The number was up to 2,000 by 2008.<sup>23</sup> The camps were supplied

with a steady stream of new recruits. Al Qaeda's Kashmiri partners, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JEM), funneled fresh fighters to the FATA training camps.<sup>24</sup> As the situation in Iraq became more tenable for the foreign fighters, Western analysts began to note an uptick in the flow of jihadists to Pakistan. Foreign fighter flows into Iraq dropped to less than 40 a month in summer 2008 compared to 110 a month a year earlier. Much of the throughput was redirected to Pakistan's tribal areas, increasing arrivals there "from a trickle to a steady stream," according to press reports.<sup>25</sup> In fact, new recruits were finding it easier than ever to reach al Qaeda's training facilities. Whereas it took several months to reach the Afghan camps prior to 9/11, new recruits were finding their way to the FATA camps in a matter of weeks.<sup>26</sup> Al Qaeda also set its sights on Western operatives, specifically the Pakistani diaspora in the United Kingdom because they can easily travel between the two countries.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the training camps, al Qaeda established Improvised Explosive Device (IED) manufacturing facilities that supplied Afghanistan and later Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> Pakistan-based al Qaeda media operations produced 58 audio/video tapes in 2006, triple the previous year's production.<sup>29</sup> 89 were produced the following year.<sup>30</sup> Georgetown University's Bruce Hoffman says, "Al Qaeda has become a world brand and their videos are the juice that fueled that recognition."<sup>31</sup>

The breathing room enjoyed in the FATA enabled al Qaeda to plan, organize, and execute global terrorist attacks. The October 2002 Bali disco bombing, November 2003 attacks on British and Jewish sites in Istanbul, March 2004 Madrid train bombing, October 2005 attacks on Bali tourist sites, July 2007 London Underground attack, and September 2008 bombing at the Islamabad Marriott hotel were all either planned, inspired, or directed from the safety of the FATA.<sup>32</sup> The ringleader of the London attacks, Mohammed Khan, traveled to Pakistan in 2003 and 2004 where he "had some contact with al Qaeda figures," according to the official British

inquiry. The report also found that Khan likely received “some relevant training in a remote part of Pakistan” and had “suspicious” communications with Pakistani-based individuals in the four months leading up to the attack.<sup>33</sup> In a separate case, British authorities arrested 24 suspected terrorists for plotting to blow up nine aircraft departing Heathrow. Five of those 24 plotters trained in the FATA.<sup>34</sup> Suspects arrested in foiled plots in Germany (July 2007), Denmark, (September 2007), and Barcelona (January 2008) were all linked to the FATA.<sup>35</sup>

**Al Qaeda’s Partnership with the Taliban.** Al Qaeda’s sanctuary in Pakistan is enabled by their symbiotic relationship with the Taliban. Unlike many of the other foreign fighters, al Qaeda’s Arabs have been deferential to the Pashtun tribal leaders.<sup>36</sup> They honor their tribal code of behavior known as *Pashtunwali* which includes the concept of *nanawati*, the principle that hospitality cannot be denied to a fugitive.<sup>37</sup> In return for this hospitality, al Qaeda has trained the Taliban’s fighters, financed their operations, and fought for their causes. Al Qaeda and the tribes are increasingly interconnected through marriage. Al Qaeda provided funding and guidance to assist Mullah Omar in reconstituting his leadership shura by winter 2002.<sup>38</sup> Al Qaeda support was a key ingredient to the Taliban’s revival in 2006 when they launched an offensive to recapture lost Afghan territory. Al Qaeda was a critical conduit for transferring successful tactics from Iraq to Afghanistan.<sup>39</sup> In return, the Taliban provided ever-expanding operating space for al Qaeda. The Taliban have progressively expanded their control over Pakistani territory by systematically unseating tribal leaders through intimidation and assassination. Over 200 tribal elders have been killed.<sup>40</sup> Initially an Afghan import, the movement took root and gained a local following. The Taliban empowered young unemployed tribesmen over the hereditary maliks, overturning the old governing order based on patronage.<sup>41</sup> With the support of the governing political party in the NWFP, extremist religious leaders and Taliban strongmen co-

opted the FATA tribes.<sup>42</sup> By 2007, the Taliban had consolidated control over the FATA and began inroads into the NWFP. A local journalist claimed, “Talibanization is seeping out of the tribal areas and spreading like a jungle fire.”<sup>43</sup> Overcoming historical animosities, the various tribes formally declared an umbrella organization, Tehrik-e-Taliban of Pakistan, in December 2007 boasting of a 40,000-man strong force.<sup>44</sup> They have assumed near-total administration of the FATA, controlling transportation, taxes, the justice system, and disbursement of government monies.<sup>45</sup> They have instituted their infamous edicts: closing girls’ schools, banning women from public sight, barring entertainment, and beating barbers.<sup>46</sup> The Pakistani Taliban are fueling the fight in Afghanistan by training and sending fighters across the border. They have also turned their sights on the Pakistani government.<sup>47</sup> Retaliating for government operations inside the FATA, the Taliban, supported by al Qaeda, launched a bombing campaign that killed 637 in Pakistan in 2007. The 56 attacks were a dramatic increase from the 6 conducted the previous year.<sup>48</sup>

**Pakistan and the Taliban.** Ironically, Pakistan’s problem was of their own making. The Taliban, or “Students,” were born in Pakistan following the Soviet Union’s withdrawal from Afghanistan. Mostly trained in Pakistani madrassas and led by former mujahedeen, the Taliban emerged in 1994 in the midst of fighting between rival warlords for the control of Afghanistan. Pakistani President Benazir Bhutto sided with the Pashtun Taliban hoping to bring the fighting on her border to a speedy conclusion.<sup>49</sup> As a proxy of Pakistan’s powerful Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI), the Taliban captured Kabul and instituted their harsh, warped brand of Islam throughout much of Afghanistan by 1996.<sup>50</sup> Pakistan encouraged volunteers to serve in the Taliban militia, and some 60,000 would do so by 9/11. Pakistani army advisors and commando units assisted the Taliban in their fight against the Northern Alliance.<sup>51</sup> Despite



growing international condemnation of the Taliban and their draconian government, Pakistan continued to side with Mullah Omar's regime.

In fact, the bond between Pakistan and the Taliban was so strong that 9/11 and US operations in Afghanistan would not sever it. The ISI continued to supply the Taliban after 9/11. An estimated 9,000 Pakistani fighters flowed into Afghanistan to fight against the United States and the Northern Alliance.<sup>52</sup> After their rout in Afghanistan, the Taliban were welcomed back to Pakistan where the ISI reportedly ran Taliban training camps and facilities, facilitated arms shipments from various Gulf countries, provided supplies and equipment, transported fighters into Afghanistan, supported them with ground artillery, and passed intelligence for safe passage.<sup>53</sup> To hide its operations from the CIA, the ISI established covert offices in Peshawar and Quetta, disguised as legitimate non-governmental organizations, to maintain their clandestine links with the Taliban.<sup>54</sup> One Taliban boasted, "It's a very close relationship. The army and Taliban are friends. Whenever a Taliban fighter is killed, army officers go to his funeral. They bring money to the family."<sup>55</sup>

Pakistan's enduring relationship with the Taliban, despite intense US pressure to cut ties, is based on Pakistan's assessment of their strategic interests vis a vis India. The Taliban are considered a natural ally should Pakistan go to war with India over Kashmir. When the Northern Alliance captured Kabul during OEF, India immediately established a massive presence in Kabul, set up consulates throughout Afghanistan, and began supplying extensive aid to the new government. These moves greatly concerned the Pakistani government who fear Indian influence in Afghanistan after the US leaves.<sup>56</sup> Maintaining the Taliban intact offers a check against Indian meddling. After 9/11, Pakistan hoped to differentiate between al Qaeda on one hand and the Taliban and its militant proxies in Kashmir on the other. Like the Taliban, the

Kashmiri militant groups LET and JEM were a strategic hedge against India. With ISI support, the Kashmiri militants effectively tied down some 100,000 Indian troops dispatched to control the insurgency in Kashmir.<sup>57</sup> Pakistan could not afford to lose two of its best tools in its fight with India. However, the ISI is losing control of its proxy, “Now the militants are autonomous. No one can control them anymore.”<sup>58</sup> This was most clearly demonstrated with the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai where ten NWFP-based LET militants killed 163 while receiving real-time instructions from Karachi.<sup>59</sup>

**Pakistan’s Support to the War on Terror.** Continuing support to the Taliban overshadows Pakistan’s reluctant yet fairly significant support of the US fight against al Qaeda. Within days of 9/11, the US State Department demanded the following of Pakistan: 1) blanket overflight and landing rights; 2) access to bases, ports, and borders for Afghan operations; 3) intelligence sharing and military cooperation; 4) detention of al Qaeda operatives and logistics at the border; 5) ending fuel shipments to the Taliban and stopping Pakistanis from joining the fight; 6) public condemnation of the Taliban; and 7) ending support of the Taliban regime. Pakistan immediately agreed to all of the US demands, in what would become known as a “first say yes, then say but...” policy.<sup>60</sup> Yet, Pakistani help would prove crucial to OEF. More than a thousand US personnel were based in or staged through Pakistan, including search and rescue units, civil engineering units, Special Forces, and CIA teams. The United States flew 57,800 sorties from Pakistan and used the Karachi seaport extensively.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond support to OEF, Pakistan also helped make a dent in the al Qaeda leadership structure. Former CIA Director Michael Hayden points out, “We have killed or captured more members of al Qaeda, more of the al Qaeda senior leadership in partnership with our Pakistani allies than we have with any other partner around the world.”<sup>62</sup> President Bush claimed that 500

members of al Qaeda were arrested in Pakistan in the first year after 9/11, including training camp leader Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi in November 2001, senior operations planner Abu Zubaydah in March 2002, East Africa bombings planner Sheikh Ahmed Saleem in July 2002, and 9/11 facilitator Ramzi bin al-Shibh in September 2002. The 9/11 mastermind, Khaleed Sheikh Mohammed (KSM), was arrested along with al Qaeda's chief financial officer in March 2003. Al Qaeda's communications director in Pakistan was arrested in July 2004 along with 12 other foreigner fighters.<sup>63</sup> Yet, all of the key high value targets captured by Pakistan have been apprehended in the cities; none have been captured in the FATA.<sup>64</sup> The tribal lands have been far more difficult for Pakistan to negotiate.

**Pakistan's Operations in the FATA.** Over the past seven years, Pakistan has conducted a largely ineffective campaign to rid the FATA of foreign and indigenous militants. Pakistani military officials claim more than 1,000 troops have been killed fighting in the tribal areas since 9/11.<sup>65</sup> Yet, most observers question Pakistan's capacity and will to wage war against the jihadists in the FATA. Critics point out that the Pakistani army is a conventionally trained and equipped force designed to fight the Indian army and not a band of insurgents. Much of the fighting has fallen to the Frontier Corps (FC), an 85,000-man strong Interior Ministry force whose members are recruited largely from the tribal population.<sup>66</sup> Hampered by loyalties to the local tribes and lacking sufficient equipment and training, the FC has been woefully overmatched by the seasoned Taliban and al Qaeda fighters. Thus, Pakistani ground operations have been sporadic, hesitant, and unfocused. Most Pakistani army forays into the FATA have been tactical and strategic failures. Many have been heavy handed and, thus, counterproductive. There has been a disturbing trend to go into an area with force and then resort to negotiations with the militants once the operations bog down.

Pakistan deployed federal troops to the FATA for the first time in its history after 9/11 ostensibly to close the border during OEF.<sup>67</sup> The deployment was cut short in January 2002 as 60,000 troops were pulled from the Afghan border and sent to the Indian border after a series of insurgent attacks in Kashmir escalated tensions between Pakistan and India.<sup>68</sup> Pakistan would eventually move some of their regular army into South Waziristan in May 2002, but to little effect.<sup>69</sup> Pakistani sweeps were cumbersome, telegraphed, and often announced beforehand, resulting in the capture of mostly low-level fighters.<sup>70</sup> Pakistani officials feared a wider tribal uprising and did little to confront the militant gains in S. Waziristan until spring 2004.<sup>71</sup> Two nearly-successful assassination attempts on Pakistani President Musharraf in December 2003 convinced him of the growing threat inside the FATA. Both plots were tied to the JEM and linked to training camps in Waziristan.<sup>72</sup> Pakistan launched operations in March 2004 hoping to root out foreign terrorists in S. Waziristan. 50,000 fled fighting that left 200 Pakistanis and 46 soldiers dead. Many of the Pakistani FC forces deserted, and the militants emerged as victors. The Pakistani government shifted gears and opened negotiations with the local militants. The eventual deal, signed in April 2004, afforded the tribal militants amnesty and financial incentives should they renounce violence, turn over foreign fighters, and end cross-border attacks. The reconciliation ceremony was a spectacle and became a symbol of the government's loss of control over the tribal militants. Not surprisingly, the agreement broke down when the tribes failed to turn over foreign fighters to the government. Pakistan then deployed 80,000 troops in force to S. Waziristan; 600 Pakistani soldiers were killed and many of the militants fled to N. Waziristan.<sup>73</sup> The Pakistani government responded with more negotiations. Various tribal leaders "surrendered" to authorities only to be released and paid for promises of future cooperation which never materialized.<sup>74</sup>

In March 2006, Pakistan turned its attention to N. Waziristan where the fighting had shifted. As they did in S. Waziristan, the Pakistani government ultimately decided to negotiate with the militants. According to the peace agreement signed in September 2006, the Pakistani army would pull out of N. Waziristan, release any prisoners captured during the recent campaign, and compensate tribesmen for any losses incurred in the fighting, while the militants would cease attacks on US forces in Afghanistan and on the Pakistani army in Pakistan.<sup>75</sup> Pakistani forces redeployed and released nearly 2,500 militants. However, cross-border incursions into Afghanistan increased by 300 percent after the agreement, while attacks on Pakistani troops ceased, albeit temporarily.<sup>76</sup> Fighting flared again in July 2007 following Pakistan's attack on the Red Mosque in Islamabad which left 102 militants dead. Militants launched a suicide bombing campaign in Punjab Province and occupied the Swat Valley in the NWFP. In response, President Musharraf announced yet another FATA offensive with much fanfare, this time in Khyber agency.<sup>77</sup> Alarming, reporters on the ground contradicted the Pakistani government's accounts.<sup>78</sup> This was a disturbing characteristic of Pakistan's military operations in the FATA; their claims of battlefield successes were often difficult to confirm. Critics suggest Pakistan deliberately stages operations for US consumption. One Taliban leader claimed, "The army comes in, and they fire at empty buildings. It is a drama—it is just to entertain America."<sup>79</sup>

US officials were optimistic that new Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari was demonstrating improved resolve when he opened another front in Bajour agency in August 2008, joining ongoing operations in the Swat Valley and around Peshawar. Former CIA Director Michael Hayden commented, "Pakistan deserves great credit for its current [multi-brigade] campaign against extremists in Bajour agency. The Pakistani army has been fighting there

forcefully and with considerable success since early August (2008). They are suffering significant casualties, but they are also imposing significant casualties on our common enemy.”<sup>80</sup>

The Pakistani government claimed victory over the Taliban in Bajour in March 2009. Pakistani Maj Gen Tariq Khan said, “The resistance has broken down. We control the roads. They have lost.” He claimed 1,600 Taliban were killed in six months of fighting, though no top leaders were killed. However, many of Bajour’s residents who fled the fighting are not convinced it is safe for them to return.<sup>81</sup> Just to the east in NWFP, as is often the case, the Pakistani government in February 2009 brokered another deal with the Taliban, this time consenting to the implementation of Islamic law (sharia) in the region and assuming a defensive posture, essentially ending the Swat campaign and ceding as much as 70 percent of the NWFP to the Taliban. Since the truce was signed, the Taliban have assassinated local anti-Taliban leaders, banned music, established new training camps, and now require one member of every family to fight in their ranks.<sup>82</sup> A clear pattern of Pakistani action in the FATA and surrounding areas has emerged: the Taliban consolidate power in particular region; the government launches an ineffective military campaign; negotiations then follow which result in government concessions to the militants. Pakistan is losing the fight, yet a plurality of Pakistanis appears to agree with the government strategy. According to polling by the US Institute of Peace, 46 percent say “the government should not try to exert control over FATA, but should try to keep the peace through negotiating deals with the local Taliban.”<sup>83</sup>

**US Operations in Pakistan.** US operations in Pakistan have been notably limited. After 9/11, the United States requested Pakistani approval for Special Forces to establish bases inside Pakistan and to operate independently against al Qaeda targets. Pakistan denied the request but agreed to allow Delta Force and Navy Seal units to accompany Pakistani forces in tribal areas

raids. This arrangement collapsed in a little more than a year due to Pakistani civilian complaints and US objections that their movements were too limited. With the hunt for Bin Laden effectively stalled, the Pentagon and CIA pushed for cross-border operations. According to the *New York Times*, the Pentagon approved an “Al Qaeda Network Exord” in 2004 authorizing US Special Forces to conduct raids against al Qaeda targets in some 20 countries, including Pakistan. A planned assault on a suspected site in the FATA to capture Bin Laden’s deputy Ayman Zawahiri in 2005 was reportedly disapproved by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld.<sup>84</sup> Nearly three years later, in the summer of 2008, President Bush approved Special Forces to carry out ground raids inside Pakistan without the approval of the Pakistani government.<sup>85</sup> A September 2008 raid in the FATA killed several Pakistani troops and drew a sharp rebuke from Pakistani Army Chief Kayani. No ground raids have been conducted since.<sup>86</sup>

The US apparently struck a deal with Pakistan in September 2008 to allow Predator strikes inside Pakistan, although Pakistan would publicly protest them for domestic consumption.<sup>87</sup> This would not be the first time the US used Predator unmanned aircraft to launch attacks inside Pakistan. Mullah Omar’s #2, Mullah Akhtar Mohammed Usmani, was killed in December 2006 as was al Qaeda’s #3, Abu Laith al-Libi, in February 2008.<sup>88</sup> There have been more than 35 Predator strikes since September 2008 killing Khalid Habib, al Qaeda’s #4; senior operatives Abu Jihad al-Masri and Abu Hassan al-Rimi; and, explosives expert Abu Khabab al-Masrim.<sup>89</sup> The DNI recently testified before Congress that, “al-Qa’ida lost significant parts of its command structure since 2008 in a succession of blows as damaging to the group as any since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001.”<sup>90</sup>

**US Support to Pakistan.** US financial and material support to Pakistan since 9/11 has been significant. President Bush quickly designated Pakistan a “non-NATO ally.” As a quid pro

quo for supporting operations in Afghanistan, the United States immediately waived Congressional sanctions placed on Pakistan in 1990 as a result of their undisclosed nuclear weapons program. The United States also forgave more than \$3.0 billion of Pakistan's debt.<sup>91</sup> Since 9/11, Pakistan has received more than \$12 billion in US assistance. Of the twenty countries receiving Coalition Support Funds to reimburse them for operations in support of the Global War on Terror, Pakistan is the largest recipient by far.<sup>92</sup> Pakistan is one of only four countries that receive direct cash transfers from the United States. Nearly 10 percent of the total US foreign assistance budget goes to Pakistan.<sup>93</sup> The GAO reported that nearly half of all funds were spent on the tribal areas. 18 percent went toward the purchase of weapons systems designed to fight India (F-16s, anti-ship missiles, and antimissile defenses).<sup>94</sup> A mere one percent was spent on development assistance for the FATA.<sup>95</sup> Recognizing this imbalance, the United States agreed to spend an additional \$750 million to support the Pakistani government's FATA Sustainable Development Plan. USAID will match Pakistani investments in development, security, infrastructure, and public diplomacy through 2012.<sup>96</sup> They are also directing a \$300 million "cash for work" initiative to combat chronic unemployment.<sup>97</sup>

### SECTION THREE: OPTIONS FOR US STRATEGY

The following section examines three options for confronting al Qaeda's safe haven in Pakistan. *Option 1* explores an Air Policing strategy similar to British colonial Air Control. *Option 2* reviews the transferability of the Al Anbar Awakening movement to Pakistan's tribes. *Option 3* considers a counterinsurgency strategy similar to recent operations in the Philippines.

**Option 1: Air Policing.** In his first testimony before the Senate as President Obama's Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates affirmed the US commitment to attacking al Qaeda



“wherever al Qaeda is.”<sup>98</sup> That includes Pakistan, where the United States has reportedly launched at least six Predator airstrikes against al Qaeda and Taliban targets since President Obama has been in office. The current US policy for confronting al Qaeda in Pakistan almost solely from the air evokes the British Air Control strategy employed over these very tribal areas some eighty years ago. Following WWI, the British turned to the Royal Air Force (RAF) to help administer the country’s far-flung colonies. Sir Winston Churchill announced: “the first duty of the RAF is to garrison the Empire.”<sup>99</sup> The RAF’s strategy of Air Control was first used against the “Mad Mullah” of Somaliland who had evaded British forces for nearly 15 years. It took 12 aircraft only three weeks to flush him out, allowing ground forces to finally capture him.<sup>100</sup> Air Control was wholeheartedly endorsed at the 1921 Cairo Conference where the British decided to replace most of their 120,000 garrisoned forces in Iraq with RAF squadrons, ultimately giving overall control of British forces in Iraq to the RAF.<sup>101</sup> Soon, Air Control was used in Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Palestine, Transjordan, and India’s Northwest Frontier. It had the benefit of reducing the Empire’s footprint on the ground which was seen as both a manpower savings and a better way to manage colonial peoples.<sup>102</sup> Sir Charles Portal, who commanded British air operations in Yemen from 1934-1935, observed that Air Control could generate a “change of heart without occupying the country of the delinquent tribe, and indeed without having any physical contact with them at all.... in some conditions control is easier without occupation.”<sup>103</sup>

The British experience in Pakistan’s tribal lands is instructive. They regularly fought the Pashtun tribes after annexing the region in 1849, conducting 54 punitive military operations by 1914.<sup>104</sup> These operations were mostly large-scale raids into tribal lands to punish wayward tribesmen before retreating back to the safety of garrison. The British fought a large tribal force in the Tirah Valley in 1897, suffering 1,994 casualties in indecisive fighting that dragged on for

more than a year. Twenty years later, the British sent an unprecedented force of 64,000 to Waziristan, this time with air forces.<sup>105</sup> The RAF supported ground operations with fire support and reconnaissance, while inflicting heavy casualties on the tribesmen in bombing and machine gun runs.<sup>106</sup> Pleased with airpower's contribution in the 1919 Waziristan campaign, British commanders began substituting independent punitive air raids for the large-scale ground operations. A campaign to quell a subsequent tribal uprising in Waziristan in 1923 claimed only three British lives.<sup>107</sup> Soon the British Air Staff proposed replacing the NW Frontier ground force with six RAF squadrons. Though the British abandoned the plan for a "hearts and minds" strategy that scaled back the use of force in the NW Frontier, Air Control was widely considered a cost-effective strategy (in both blood and money) to manage the colonies.<sup>108</sup>

Yet, an analysis of British air operations during the interwar years by James Corum and Wray Johnson, in their book *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists*, found "little support to the idea of conducting police/peacekeeping operations with airpower as the single or predominant force."<sup>109</sup> Rather, air power was best employed as a force multiplier in support of ground operations. Malcolm Smith's *British Air Strategy Between the Wars* notes, "In highly-populated areas, like Palestine, the Air Ministry did not even claim to be able to do a better job than land forces."<sup>110</sup> Corum and Johnson further concluded that, "Bombing civilians, or targeting insurgents and terrorists in urban areas with resulting civilian casualties, generally works to the propaganda advantage of the rebels."<sup>111</sup> This is a key limitation of an Air Policing strategy. To be fair, current US air operations over the FATA are neither punitive nor indiscriminate. But, the unintentional killing of civilians presents a growing problem; more than 100 have been killed during the current Predator campaign.<sup>112</sup> Pakistani officials are quick to point out how these deaths are severely complicating their efforts to woo the tribes. The

incidents are used extensively by the Taliban and NWFP politicians to flame anti-Western sentiment in the tribal areas. Despite extreme caution and extensive efforts to minimize collateral damage, US airstrikes are largely viewed as indiscriminate. One FATA legislator commented, “It’s not justice to kill 5 Taliban and 95 civilians.” A Pakistani Presidential spokesman said, “Even when the real militants get killed, there is also a high probability that unarmed civilians get killed. People get galvanized and become sympathetic to the militants.”<sup>113</sup> 80 percent of Pakistanis oppose US strikes within their borders.<sup>114</sup>

**Option 2: The Awakening.** A different approach to addressing al Qaeda’s sanctuary in Pakistan is importing the “Awakening” movement that was so successful in Iraq’s Anbar Province. US Special Operations Command reportedly recommended such an approach to the Pentagon in 2007. Their plan recommended financing, equipping, and training a tribal militia force. According to press reports, the Defense Intelligence Agency endorsed the plan to empower FATA’s tribes against al Qaeda but warned success “would be difficult to achieve, particularly in the north (Bajour) and south (North and South Waziristan).”<sup>115</sup> When asked about the applicability of the lessons learned from Iraq to the FATA, then CIA Director Michael Hayden called it a “distinct possibility.”<sup>116</sup>

The Anbar Awakening began to take shape in the summer of 2006 when the Sunni tribes started securing their neighborhoods against al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). At the time, AQI had taken over the province and was using it as a staging ground for attacks in Baghdad. The US had lost 1,300 soldiers there in fierce fighting in Haditha and Fallujah.<sup>117</sup> However, AQI overplayed its hand, killing too many Sunni tribesmen during their intimidation campaign to seize control of the province. Soon, some 200 tribal sheikhs banded together to form a broad-based alliance to confront AQI. They armed small groups of fighters, many former anti-coalition insurgents, to

hunt down and kill AQI fighters. The tribes partnered with US and Iraqi forces and were eventually sanctioned by the Iraqi government. They achieved dramatic successes. Iraq's most deadly city, Ramadi, averaged 25 AQI attacks a day in the summer of 2006. A year later, those attacks had been cut to four a day. Total attacks province-wide were reduced by half in less than a year.<sup>118</sup> US support to the movement was key to its success. The US supported the Awakening with both funds and forces, dispatching an additional 5,000 troops to Anbar. Militia operations were backed up with US airstrikes and Special Forces raids. The tribesmen were essentially added to the US payroll. The United States paid for them to receive specialized training in Jordan.<sup>119</sup> This massive investment with operational and logistical support was crucial to the movement's success. Bill Roggio, managing editor of *The Long War Journal*, suggests that a FATA Awakening without direct US support "would be a death sentence for any tribe foolish enough to join the fight."<sup>120</sup>

Critics of this approach point out that the underlying conditions in Pakistan do not compare well with those in Anbar. AQI was a predominantly foreign force with intentions of overthrowing the tribal order. In 2006, AQI declared the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq in Ramadi. This was a direct threat to the tribal sheikhs.<sup>121</sup> It was this cleavage that gave rise to the Awakening—it was not created by US or Iraqi forces. Many suggest there is no similar cleavage between the FATA tribes now almost exclusively run by the Taliban and their al Qaeda guests. The Taliban have deep roots in the FATA, nourished by nearly 30 years of continuous conflict.<sup>122</sup> Others concerned about importing the Awakening movement suggest the United States is creating tomorrow's problem to solve today's. While the movement has been widely hailed as a success in Iraq, there are warning signs that the gains could be temporary. The Awakening movement at first appeared to have lost the February 2009 provincial elections

to a rival Sunni political party. Ahmed Abu Risha, one of the movement's leaders was defiant, "We will form the government of Anbar anyway. An honest dictatorship is better than a democracy won through fraud."<sup>123</sup> The concern from the outset in Iraq was that empowering local tribes could eventually threaten the fledgling central government. That is certainly the fear in Pakistan, especially of the fragile government in Islamabad. They are hesitant to flood the already volatile region with additional arms and training.

Yet, many still believe empowering the tribes against al Qaeda may yield fruit. There are signs of an indigenous movement beginning to take shape. A village posse from Shalbandi in the NWFP tracked down and killed six Taliban fighters in September 2008. When the Taliban retaliated with a suicide bombing that left 30 dead, the town's tribal leaders stood firm and said they would not be intimidated.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, a citizen army in the NWFP town of Shabqadar killed nine and injured 28 Taliban fighters. Their tribal leader told the NWFP governor to "open many fronts. We are more than them."<sup>125</sup> By the fall of 2008, Pakistan estimated that three tribal militias, or lashkars, with a total of 14,000 fighters had been formed in Bajour province. Another 4,000-strong lashkar had formed in Orakzai, and yet another in the NWFP town of Dir boasted of 7,000 fighters.<sup>126</sup> These militias are filling the vacuum left by Pakistani forces who cannot or will not protect them from Taliban attacks. The Taliban has responded swiftly, sending reinforcements to contested areas and embarking on terror campaigns against those who join the lashkars. A Taliban suicide bomber killed 100 during a lashkar organizational meeting in Orakzai.<sup>127</sup> The Taliban routinely behead those suspected of spying for the government or the United States, leaving the headless bodies in the streets with notes warning would-be spies of a similar fate.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari announced the purchase of Chinese-made AK-47 assault rifles for FATA lashkars during a visit to Beijing in October 2008, but many feel the government is doing too little to reinforce the fledgling movement.<sup>128</sup> Support from Islamabad has been sporadic and hesitant. “We do not want the lashkars to become an offensive force,” said one Pakistani general who is unwilling to provide them with heavy weapons. As a result, the Taliban are better equipped and certainly more experienced. Many of the tribesmen feel betrayed by the government. This is in stark contrast to the Anbar Awakening who “woke up to millions of dollars in government assistance and the support of the 3rd Infantry Division.”<sup>129</sup> Khalid Aziz, a former NWFP official, complained, “Some communities have risen up against the militants, and the government has to capitalize on this, has to prop them up. They haven’t.”<sup>130</sup>

**Option 3: Counterinsurgency Operations.** Opponents of the Air Policing and Awakening strategies argue that the nature of the conflict in Pakistan requires a different approach, suggesting a counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy that changes the underlying conditions is more appropriate. The *US Army Counterinsurgency Manual* dictates a range of actions beyond combat operations, including economic development, governance building and reform, provision of essential services, host nation security force improvements, and support to civil security operations.<sup>131</sup> David Galula, in *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, likens kinetic conventional operations in COIN to that of a “fly swatter.”<sup>132</sup> That is because insurgents generally do not attempt to hold specific territory, they replace losses quickly, and their superior mobility complicates successful targeting by the counterinsurgent.<sup>133</sup> Consequently, killing the insurgent is not the ultimate objective, but rather winning the support of the local populace. Galula suggests that victory requires “permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population.”<sup>134</sup> Recent US experience in the Philippines demonstrates the importance of

severing the link between the insurgent force and the local population and may offer lessons for future operations in Pakistan.

The United States deployed Joint Task Force-510 to southern Philippines in February 2002 to participate in a long-standing annual joint exercise (Balikatan 02-1) with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The 1,300 US personnel were limited by the Philippine constitution to a strictly advisory role. They were prohibited from participating in combat operations and were authorized to use force only in self-defense.<sup>135</sup> The main thrust of the action centered on the island of Basilan which was home base for the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), a 1,000-man strong terrorist organization with links to al Qaeda. By 2002, the AFP had ceded much of the island to the ASG. Most of the teachers, doctors, and other professionals had fled. No non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had operated there since 1999.<sup>136</sup> In preparation for the deployment, a two-man US civil affairs team scouted the island interviewing as many of Basilan's 300,000 inhabitants as possible.<sup>137</sup> The survey was designed to "build a map of disenfranchisement to ascertain where active and passive support would likely blossom."<sup>138</sup> The team discovered that the ASG was strongest in the mostly-Muslim southern part of the island where the government was weakest. They also found the islanders desperately needed clean water, medical care, and transportation infrastructure.<sup>139</sup>

160 Special Forces (SF) personnel were dispatched into the ASG strongholds. They first bolstered defenses at AFP base camps, and then focused on training the junior officer and noncommissioned officer corps. The training was designed to instill confidence and increase unit proficiency by improving decision-making, command and control, combat lifesaving, and response to dynamic intelligence.<sup>140</sup> A dramatic increase in AFP patrolling reduced ASG operating space and created an expanding security zone.<sup>141</sup> The US role also extended to

advising and assisting Filipino commandos during their raids. The improving security enabled the deployment of 300 Naval Construction Task Group (NCTG) personnel. During their 60-day mission, the NCTG constructed a C-130 capable runway, eight helicopter landing zones, 80 kilometers of roads, four bridges, a pier, and three deepwater wells. In addition, SF medical personnel ran free clinics across the island, treating as many as 1,000 patients a day.<sup>142</sup> The US Agency for International Development also invested heavily in Basilan, building a dam, water-filtration plant, and school.<sup>143</sup> Through it all, the United States stayed as far in the background as possible, giving credit to the Philippine government. The improved security, construction projects, and medical clinics strengthened the image of the Philippine government and reduced Muslim support for the ASG. Professionals, NGOs, and investors began returning to the island. Subsequent Filipino operations nearly destroyed the ASG. Philippine forces killed the group's leader and his two top lieutenants in 2006. The ASG has only 200 members today.<sup>144</sup>

Journalist and author Robert D. Kaplan has written, "If the United States and Pakistan are ever to pacify the radicalized tribal agencies of the Afghan-Pakistani borderlands, it will have to be through a variation on how Special Forces operated in Basilan; direct action alone will not be enough."<sup>145</sup> The Pakistani government seems to agree and emphasizes that a military-only solution cannot work in the FATA. In 2006, with the help of the US State Department, Pakistan initiated the FATA Sustainable Development Plan to invest \$2 billion in the region through 2015. One Pakistani economist was not convinced, "The government's lofty claims notwithstanding, it has neither the capacity nor the willingness to undertake a mini-Marshall plan."<sup>146</sup> Similarly, a recent Center for Strategic and International Studies report warned, "delivering \$150 million in aid to the tribal areas could very quickly make a few people rich and do almost nothing to provide opportunity and justice to the region." The report's author said,



“The insecurity of the area will require a heavy reliance on local partners. But the nongovernmental organizations don’t trust the military, the military doesn’t trust the tribal chiefs, and the tribal chiefs won’t trust us unless they’re getting a cut of the money.”<sup>147</sup> Getting the aid into the right hands will be problematic. The Taliban has decimated the tribal structure. There are few friendly tribal leaders and no NGOs able to implement the development programs. Many fear that an infusion of funds would only benefit the Taliban leadership and help them consolidate gains.

Offering an important caution, William McCallister, who most recently served as an advisor to the US Marines in Iraq, makes a compelling case against any expansive development and political reform agenda for the FATA, bluntly stating, “We are not going to win hearts or change minds.” Writing in the *Small Wars Journal*, he highlighted the “risk of engaging an opponent whose strategic calculus differs so markedly from our own.” He warned against any attempt to alter the deep-rooted cultural and societal norms of the tribal system: “Western notions of legitimacy and good governance are unlikely to resonate with individual tribesmen since they do not share our cultural heritage and appreciation for the implied wisdom these concepts embody.”<sup>148</sup> Thus, any strategy must be culturally appropriate and self-sustaining.

#### **SECTION FOUR: RECOMMENDATIONS**

There will be no easy victory in Pakistan. The United States and its allies have been in Afghanistan for eight years with a heavy investment in troops and development; yet, the Taliban remain resilient. Most of the gains are reversible. “Winning” in Pakistan will take a long time, a large commitment, and a heavy dose of patience. The status quo is not sufficient. Al Qaeda continues to operate with impunity; Bin Laden and Zawahiri continue to “plan high impact plots”

from the FATA.<sup>149</sup> There are too many negative trends to simply muddle through. None of the previously described approaches *alone* will lead to victory. What is needed is a hybrid approach. The following considerations should guide the strategy.

The primary effort of any US strategy in Pakistan must be eliminating or minimizing the immediate terrorist threat. Former CIA Director Michael Hayden made the case for continued pressure on al Qaeda in Pakistan at a recent public forum:

The United States should deepen [al Qaeda's] isolation, disturb the safe haven, target terrorist leaders there, and keep al Qaeda off balance. By making a safe haven feel less safe, we keep al Qaeda guessing. We make them doubt their allies, question their methods, their plans, even their priorities. Most importantly, we force them to spend more time and resources on self-preservation, and that distracts them, at least partially and at least for a time from laying the groundwork for the next attack. Killing, capturing, disrupting al Qaeda senior leaders, wherever they may find or seek sanctuary, is absolutely essential to thwarting attacks on the West.<sup>150</sup>

At the same time, the United States must tread carefully on Pakistani sovereignty. Daniel Markey, a Southeast Asian expert in President Bush's State Department, warns, "The long-term costs of a bilateral rupture between Washington and Islamabad are likely to outweigh the potential gains from eliminating nearly any al-Qaeda leader."<sup>151</sup> Unilateral US action alienates the civilian population, complicates Pakistani government efforts, and is ripe for militant propaganda when there is collateral damage. To the full extent possible, the United States should enable Pakistani ground raids (with intelligence, transportation, etc.) rather than conduct unilateral airstrikes. This will minimize collateral damage and foster Pakistani goodwill. If, however, Pakistan cannot or will not act against a priority target, the United States must do so.

Ultimately, the United States cannot succeed in the FATA without the full support of the government of Pakistan. Clearly, the Pakistanis must do more to prove they are reliable partners. To that end, all future US aid to the government in Islamabad, especially high-end equipment better suited for war with India, must be contingent on Pakistan's taking concrete steps to

eliminate al Qaeda's sanctuary in the FATA. Pakistan must allow the deployment of a small US contingent to enable more effective military operations. This force could be limited to a train-and-advise role similar to that in OEF-P. This certainly is not the Clear-Hold-Build strategy of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Pakistan must take the lead. The fragility of the elected government in Islamabad and the significant anti-American sentiment will require a nuanced approach. US operations in and with Pakistan cannot destabilize the nuclear armed country.

The United States should also seek to exploit cleavages between the various parties. William McCallister suggests that the "formation of factions within the tribe is a leader's greatest threat." To that end, he suggests the United States work to "divide and isolate the tribe from its existing societal network in order to destroy the elite group of dedicated, hard-core fighters that form the vanguard of the embedded Islamist movement."<sup>152</sup> The United States and Pakistan must reinforce local tribes that stand up to the Taliban. We should move to bolster the nascent movements as quickly as the Taliban has been to counter them. They are our allies. We cannot afford to lose them to the Taliban. The United States and Pakistan should also exploit the divergent goals and ethnic composition of the Pakistani Taliban and al Qaeda.<sup>153</sup> The Pakistani Taliban are likely far more focused on "concerns closer to home" than are al Qaeda's senior leaders who long for a restored Caliphate.<sup>154</sup>

The only lasting solution to Pakistani sanctuary for al Qaeda is a comprehensive COIN effort. This requires a long-term "generational" investment in the region. The foremost concern is security; it is a precondition for all else in a COIN effort. The United States and Pakistan cannot invest in development in a dangerous environment. Because the United States will not and should not deploy a robust ground force into Pakistan, it must rely on Pakistani forces. That requires a concerted effort to build Pakistani partner capacity. This will be the primary goal of

the proposed US ground force. RAND's Christine Fair cautions, "Training, equipping and professionalizing a competent Frontier Corps is fraught with multidimensional problems and will take years—not months—to do."<sup>155</sup> Daniel Markey agrees and suggests that a "strategic stalemate" is the most the US and Pakistan can hope for in the near-term.<sup>156</sup>

Economic development must quickly follow improved security if the gains are to be lasting. If local tribal leaders can provide their constituents with services and resources, they can compete with the Taliban for public support. However, there are very few local interlocutors with which the United States and Pakistan can deal. In fact, some projects will require negotiations with unscrupulous characters in order to move forward. Fair suggests "it may make better sense to move quickly to fund projects in relatively secure areas within FATA as well as the adjacent settled areas."<sup>157</sup> In other words, Talibanization must be contained with a firewall. Part of that firewall is a broad-based educational reform that will counter the extreme messages of many of Pakistan's 10,000 madrassas. Pervez Hoodbhoy, a leading professor of nuclear physics at Islamabad's top university, laments, "It goes deeper than changing textbooks. It's a matter of changing society."<sup>158</sup>

Additionally, the FATA must be politically incorporated into Pakistan if it is to be protected from Taliban militancy. Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist Steve Coll, a long-time observer of the region, asserts that the "only way al Qaeda can be marginalized ... is to change the conditions in which they thrive by incorporating the tribal areas into a modernizing, successful Pakistani state."<sup>159</sup> This requires a multi-pronged strategy. First, the FCR must be reconsidered. While 72 percent of urban Pakistanis favor greater political inclusion for the FATA, there are those who reject the calls for greater incorporation (suggesting the tribesmen prefer their customary laws executed through the jirga system as opposed to the Pakistani system

widely viewed as corrupt).<sup>160</sup> Local FATA political leaders must be empowered to determine their fate—the solution cannot be imposed from Islamabad. Any constitutional change for the FATA should be measured and gradual. Second, Pakistan must lift the ban on political parties. This will allow opposing ideas to compete with the region’s radical ideology. Third, the United States and Pakistan should continually seek a political solution with the tribes, even the Taliban. The United States “should pursue to separate those Islamist movements with local or national objectives from those that, like al Qaeda, seek to attack the United States or its allies directly—instead of lumping them all together.”<sup>161</sup> However, cooperation cannot be based on promises of future support. They must begin to turn over al Qaeda first.

Lastly, FATA operations must be coordinated with Afghan operations to minimize bleed off. Counterinsurgency theorist David Galula posits that “border areas are a permanent source of weakness for the counterinsurgent ... By moving from one side of the border to the other, the insurgent is often able to escape pressure, or, at least, to complicate operations for his opponent.”<sup>162</sup> President Obama recently announced the deployment of an additional 19,000 US combat troops to Afghanistan. They will fail unless their mission is fully coordinated and supported by US strategy in Pakistan. The two are inextricably linked.

**Conclusion.** In March 2009, President Obama announced a “comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” The plan calls for a near-doubling of US troops in Afghanistan and \$10 billion in additional aid to Pakistan over the next five years to help develop the FATA and improve the Pakistani Army’s COIN capacity. It is a welcome infusion of resources. The new strategy reflects many of this paper’s recommendations, measures that represent a comprehensive strategy for systematically eliminating al Qaeda’s sanctuary in the FATA. The FATA’s infrastructure, hospitality, and poor governance have made it an ideal

safe haven for al Qaeda's senior leadership. Though recent operations have put pressure on al Qaeda in Pakistan, the FATA continues to function as a key enabler for the terrorist network. More than any place on Earth, the FATA represents the central front in the war against al Qaeda and its affiliates. The *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community* reported, "It is conceivable al-Qa'ida could relocate elsewhere in South Asia, the Gulf, or parts of Africa where it could exploit a weak central government and close proximity to established recruitment, fundraising, and facilitation networks, but we judge none of these locations would be as conducive to their operational needs as their location in the FATA." The United States cannot defeat al Qaeda as long as it operates with impunity in Pakistan. The United States cannot stabilize Afghanistan as long as the Taliban roam freely across the border. Pakistan's fragile democracy cannot survive the ever-expanding militant onslaught. To achieve these security objectives, the United States must employ a hybrid approach that incorporates elements of air policing, the Awakening, and classical COIN. The priority effort must be minimizing the immediate terrorist threat generated from the FATA, preferably in partnership with Pakistan but unilaterally if necessary. However, this near-term effort must be paired with a long-term COIN strategy that rolls back the Taliban and shrinks al Qaeda's operating space inside Pakistan. Above all, the United States must recognize the depth of the challenge. Sir Winston Churchill wrote of the FATA in 1897 having spent six weeks there, "Every man's hand is against the other, and all against the stranger.... The state of continual tumult has produced a habit of mind which reck little of injuries, holds life cheap and embarks on war with careless levity."<sup>163</sup> Little has changed in the century since these words were written; yet, it is here that the United States must fight al Qaeda. This is the central front.

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<sup>1</sup> Senate, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 6.

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- <sup>2</sup> Riedel, “Al Qaeda Strikes Back,” under “War Games.”
- <sup>3</sup> President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, v.
- <sup>4</sup> President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, 6.
- <sup>5</sup> President, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, February 2003, 22.
- <sup>6</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *9/11 Commission Report*, 366-367.
- <sup>7</sup> National Intelligence Council, *Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland*.
- <sup>8</sup> US GAO, *Combating Terrorism: The United States Lacks Comprehensive Plan to Destroy the Terrorist Threat and Close the Safe Haven in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas*, 3.
- <sup>9</sup> Hayden, “State of al Qaeda Today.”
- <sup>10</sup> Senate, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Lamb, *Ungoverned Areas and Threats from Safe Havens*, 6.
- <sup>12</sup> Rabasa, *Ungoverned Territories: Understanding and Reducing Terrorism Risks*, 15-21.
- <sup>13</sup> DeYoung, “World Bank Lists Failing Nations That Can Breed Global Terrorism.”
- <sup>14</sup> World Bank, *Engaging with Fragile States: An Independent Evaluation Group Review of World Bank Support to Low-Income Countries Under Stress*, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> Rabasa, *Ungoverned Territories: Understanding and Reducing Terrorism Risks*, 23.
- <sup>16</sup> Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 265.
- <sup>17</sup> International Crisis Group, *Pakistan’s Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants*, 4-7.
- <sup>18</sup> Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 234, 272.
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